

THE NEW YORK ARCHITECT

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TOWN PLANNING: FORMAL OR IRREGULAR*



UR subject is one both deep in significance—for it goes to the root of all town-planning design—and difficult of solution, for it opens up the whole problem of convention in art, as to

which a controversy as old as art criticism has invaded every form of design from portrait-painting to gardening. If we were to interpret the two views in such terms as some of the extremists on each side make use of, it would be fairly easy to put a strong case against either party. Those who say that the town plan should consist entirely of straight streets and square places symmetrically arranged upon an axial basis obviously ignore both the economic necessities and the great architectural opportunities which spring from the fact that the site upon which the plan is to be carried out has in England, in nine cases out of ten, an undulating surface, and contains many marked features of an irregular character. On the other hand, those who maintain that because the site consists of hills and hollows, and is marked by winding streams and devious highways, uplands with ragged edges, and the random boundary-lines of private properties, it is therefore unnatural and out of harmony with the site to plan straight streets or lay out symmetrical groups of buildings, seem, on the other hand, to neglect altogether the legitimate function of human design and the application of architectural principles natural to a work so intimately connected with architectural expression as that of town planning.

Unless the extreme formalist is prepared to depend upon gigantic feats of engi-

* A paper (illustrated by lantern slides) read by Mr. Raymond Unwin, F.R.I.B.A., before the Architectural Association of London, at its meeting on October 18th, and quoted in the *London Building News* of October 20th.

neering to provide for him a sufficiently formal stage for the display of his design, however formal he may make it on the paper plan, many sites will play pranks with the lines of his elevations. In fact, we cannot, if we are to obtain any success, think of town planning as the creation of a pattern in two dimensions, but must necessarily think of it in three. The formalist will admit that on an undulating surface many of his straight lines will always be seen as curves, and I cannot conceive any valid reason why he should not curve his lines on plan if by so doing he can secure a horizontal line for his elevation—a matter which may be of vital importance to the formal effect he aims to produce. This line of argument seems to give an opening to the advocate of the irregular school to come along and say: "What is this formalism and symmetry, anyway? Is it anything but a mere conventional rule to make it easy for the imaginative mind to produce harmless designs? What possible justification is there for limiting the design to the symmetrical, the straight, or the square?" He has studied the lines which have pleased him in the world around—the sweep of the seashore, the outline of the mountain slope, and the subtle forms of leaves and flowers, as seen fore-shortened in their natural state, and has found no formality. True, he must admit some degree of symmetry in the balancing of parts, of the bodies of men and animals; but he will urge that this is always associated with an extreme degree of subtle modelling with some inexactitude, and that the symmetry of bodily form—except, perhaps, when laid out in death—is always modified by the want of symmetry of the pose in which it is seen. Upon the strength of this, he argues, "Why should I not have for my design the same freedom that I see in these forms around me?"

THE ESSENTIAL FALLACY OF DESIGNEDLY
IRREGULAR PLANNING.

I am not sure whether here we have not stumbled on the essential fallacy of this point of view—the idea that the free exercise of fancy, uncontrolled by any precision of purpose or law of proportion, is the natural basis for the highest type of design in all branches of human activity. John Ruskin is not accepted nowadays as a safe guide in all matters of architectural art; but I should like to quote what he says about that idea of liberty which regards it as meaning the right to do what we like. He says: “Nor is it the least among the sources of more serious satisfaction which I have found in the pursuit of a subject that at first appeared to bear but slightly on the grave interests of mankind, that the conditions of material perfection which it leads me, in conclusion, to consider furnish a strange proof of how false is the conception, how frantic the pursuit, of that treacherous phantom which men call liberty—most treacherous, indeed, of all phantoms; for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show us that not only its attainment, but its being, was impossible. There is no such thing in the universe. There can never be. The stars have it not, the earth has it not, the sea has it not, and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment.” I would like further to suggest that in the alternative definition—first given, I believe, by James Hinton—“that liberty is the power to like what we may do,” will be found some reply to the extreme formalist. Certainly a good deal of what may be seen of informal town planning and *art-nouveau* architecture does support the view that in the studied irregularities the designers are parodying the lines of a nature which they do not understand, and caricaturing a type of beauty which their art is incapable of creating; but, because of this, to maintain that no one is competent to compose, either in the form of buildings or in the field of town planning on a symmetrical line, that the beauties of proportion and relation can only be displayed when axially planned, seems to me a proposition which is amply disproved by many of the most beautiful buildings, streets, and places which have re-

sulted from the work of the greatest periods of the past. But our discussion is approaching the most unprofitable point of trying to decide one of those never-to-be-settled problems as to how far we may sway towards one view or another, the extreme and logical outcome of each of which we feel to be unsatisfactory. To avoid this danger, I suggest that we try and approach the subject from another point of view.

WHAT IS TOWN PLANNING?

What constitutes it as an art, and what limitations must artistic expression through this medium accept? Town planning consists in making provision for the needs and affording satisfaction for the aspirations of an organized community. It is its purpose to minister to the convenience of the inhabitants, to increase the efficiency of their associated industrial and commercial activities, to foster their social intercourse and their intellectual development by the facilities which it affords, and to add to the pleasure of their lives by preserving the amenities of the town as a place of residence. This is, in mere outline, the useful function which town planning must fulfil. The very expression of some of its purposes would constitute town planning an art, and it is impossible, as in the kindred art of architecture, to draw any precise line between the useful purpose and the beauty of the form adopted to satisfy that purpose, the two being intermingled. If properly appreciated, both by the citizen and the artist, these two aspects of the subject are not antagonistic; but they may become antagonistic if the artist forgets the purpose of that which he is creating, and imagines that it is his duty to create something beautiful which the citizens may with an effort make use of, instead of creating something useful and expressing it in a beautiful form.

FORMAL PLANNING AND ITS LIMITATIONS.

Here at once we meet with definite limitations of a practical nature within which the designer must work. It may be true that the steep, straight street leading over the top of the hill would make an excellent basis for a formal scheme; but if every cyclist has to dismount and push his machine up that hill, and every driver to walk his horse with diffi-

culty down the other side, the purpose of convenient access will hardly have been satisfied, and any beauty which the design may have will be rendered unpleasing by its obvious want of suitability to its proper purpose. We see, therefore, that our plan, whatever its form, must properly satisfy the requirements of use, and must be adapted to the nature of the site. These may be taken as two cardinal principles of successful town planning design—principles which are sufficiently important to overrule any mere question of formality of plan when they are antagonistic to it. Though these practical considerations will often be irreconcilable with some preconceived formal scheme, it is not often that they will be antagonistic to all forms of beautiful expression. Much has been written on the relation between use and beauty, and I must not wander off into a discussion on this point. Suffice it to say that in town planning, at any rate, beauty is intimately associated with use, with fitness for purpose and function; but it is not the same thing. It is not enough to satisfy the use and trust that by chance beauty will result. Use and fitness will dictate certain lines of development, but it is seldom that these will be exact lines; rather they will usually be limits of deviation, and it is within those limits which the useful purpose allows that the town-planner must keep, and it is of the scope which they afford him that he must take advantage to produce the beauty of form at which he is aiming.

UNFORESEEN AND UNFORESEEABLE LIMITATIONS.

But not only are these limitations due to the useful purposes of town planning: there are, as in other arts, limitations due to the medium. First of all, this art is not complete in itself. The town-planner but lays down the general design—creates the opportunities. He must depend upon the architects who come after him to fill in the details and take advantage of the opportunities he has created. He will be able, to a greater or less extent, to influence the result by determining the position of main buildings, and sometimes by fixing frontage-lines and limiting the heights and character of the buildings; but at best he must leave all detail out of his count: he can deal only with the main masses.

It is by the handling of these masses of building, and the disposition of the spaces or voids between them, by bringing all the masses and spaces into proportion with each other, and the whole into proper relation to the site, so as to produce an organic composition, and by this alone, that town planning can speak—can produce its effect. It is by the completeness of the organic composition, also, that town planning gives expression to the ideas of corporate activity, civic association, and human fellowship—a range of ideas which can hardly, with equal adequacy, be expressed in any other way. If that be so, then our artistic aim proves true when brought to the test which Mr. Reginald Blomfield has well suggested when he says: "This is, I think, the vital touchstone of any art—that what it does can only be done by that one particular art." Anything, then, which contributes to the force and clearness of this expression of the organic unity of the city must be proper to the practice of this art, while anything that detracts from or blurs this expression must be improper. It is by appealing to the sense of correlation which springs from spacing and proportion, to the sense of unity which springs from definitely apprehended form, whether in plan by the disposition of the parts upon a level plain, or in elevation by the piling of them up upon the hillside, that alone we can produce this our highest form of expression. We are seeking definiteness of form. It can hardly be right to take informality or irregularity as our means.

TOWN PLANNING SHOULD BE FORMAL WITHIN LIMITS.

To sum up, I believe, then, that town planning should be formal, using the word in a broad sense, and always remembering that there are limits set by the useful purposes that the plan must provide for, by the nature and opportunities afforded by the site, and by the relation of the beholder to the city which he views—all of which will very often cause the essential effects to depend upon a formalism which does not hesitate to depart from exact regularity on the paper plan, when by doing so more adequate expression can be given to some element of the design more essential to the complete unity of the result than the element of formality.

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CYRUS P. THOMAS, 1833-1911.

CYRUS P. THOMAS, who died at his home in Cambridge, Mass., on October 16, was seventy-eight years old. He was born in Leamington, England. He practiced architecture and did important church, public and bank work in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Montreal and Toronto, prior to going to Chicago, where he was in active practice for thirty years. For four years he was partner of O. S. Wheelock, and for six years partner of C. W. Rapp.

For the last fifteen years Mr. Thomas had lived in Toronto, Canada, London, England and Cambridge, Mass. He was always actively interested in the higher ethics of the profession and in recent years devoted himself to art, literature, music and the drama.

Prior to his retirement from active practice, Mr. Thomas was considered one of the leading architects in Chicago. He designed a number of important buildings on State Street shortly after the great fire.

Mr. Thomas is survived by his widow, Jenny L. Thomas (née Hoffman) and his daughter, Elsie Thomas.

SOUTH BEND EXHIBIT

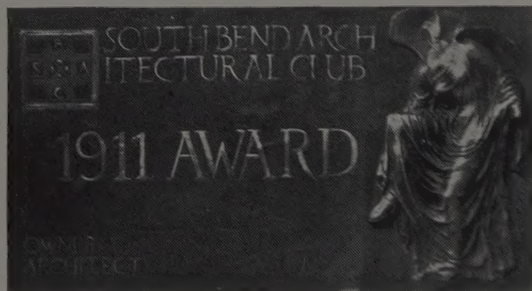
South Bend Architectural Club, an organization of fifteen architects, draftsmen and material men, has lately given an Architectural Exhibit that was a success in every way.

Open during the two hottest weeks (June 10-25) of last Summer, there was an attendance of 1,300 in that city of 55,000. The work shown there was previously exhibited in Indianapolis, a city four times as large, and in a longer time the admissions were fewer. At South Bend, however, the admission was free. The uplifting effect was stimulating.

At the opening of the exhibit the Club was host for the June meeting of Indiana Chapter, A. I. A.

The expense of the exhibit was \$398.27,	
less \$21.61, not charged.....	\$376.66
The cost of entertainment, \$115.01, less	
\$44.15, contributed	70.86
	<hr/> \$447.52

The receipts were:	
From advertising	\$435.00
From exhibitors (electric current).....	8.73
	<hr/> 438.73
Deficit	<hr/> \$8.79



"To stimulate the public to adopt more aesthetic handlings of architectural problems, South Bend Architectural Club establishes an annual honor award for the best building project completed each year in South Bend or vicinity.

"The award will be a bronze relief suitably inscribed, which is to be attached to the building picked for honor by the Jury of Award.

"A building will be held eligible for the award when the parking and dependencies, if any, are completed.

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"The award will be made in September of each year, beginning with 1912.

"The Jury of Award will consist of three judges qualified by education and training. The method of naming these judges will be announced to the public later.

"The announcement of the award will be made at a formal dinner following the annual meeting of South Bend Architectural Club, on the first Thursday of January.

"But no award will be made in any year if, in the judgment of South Bend Architectural Club, or of the Jury of Award, no building of sufficient merit is eligible."

Mr. Rolland Adelsperger, the secretary of the club, writes:

"We believe our plan of award better than that of giving a medal.

"We expect some criticism for pirating Praxiteles' beautiful Nike for the figure at the right—but remember, we can't afford to have a sculptor of renown model a figure that cannot possibly excel the one chosen. Yet, if such a scheme of award were to be adopted by several clubs, the greatest living sculptor could be retained to create an appropriate figure. The club name and emblem would then be the variants.

"The character of the award can be safeguarded by stipulations in the deed of gift—for instance, that no mention of it shall be made in an advertisement."



DETAIL OF UPPER PORTION, PRUDENTIAL NORTH BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.

GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS

THE PRUDENTIAL GROUP, NEWARK, N. J.

GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS



THE two sections of the North Building of the Prudential Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey, recently completed by Messrs. George B. Post & Sons, New York, make the

present Prudential Group cover the greater portion of three blocks in the city of Newark.

The commission to erect the original building, at the southwest corner of Broad and Bank Streets, was won in competition in 1890 by Mr. George B. Post, and it is interesting to note that the completed structure is almost a true expression of Mr. Post's conception as shown in his competition drawing. In style this building was a complete departure from all previous work done by Mr. Post who had up to that time adhered closely to the Classical or the Renaissance. But Mr. Post had been a leader in the introduction and development of high office buildings in New York and vicinity and freely availed himself of any opportunity presented by this ever-changing problem. At this time exterior walls were almost universally not only self-supporting but also bearing walls, and therefore for buildings more than eight stories in height the walls were of such great thickness as to be almost prohibitory.

The introduction of wall arches grouping many stories and windows was a great practical improvement, bettering very much the light of the windows within the arches excepting those at the top. In this instance it was found that an additional improvement could also be made by splaying the jambs of the piers between the arches. The long vertical lines and splay jambs suggest immediately the Gothic style. Thus the adoption of piers, spand as far apart as the plan permitted, instead of a continuous wall, enabled Mr. Post, without too serious an encroachment upon the floor space of the lower stories and with a gain in dignity and sturdiness of effect in design, to add many stories to the



DETAIL, PRUDENTIAL BUILDING,
NEWARK, N. J.

GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS

number permissible by other methods of construction then employed.

Another practical reason for this treatment was the extreme narrowness of Bank Street, the light of which would have been interfered with seriously if heavy projecting cornices had been used, as would have been necessary in the Classical or Renaissance styles. Mr. Post explained his adoption of Gothic for this building in a letter sent with his drawings to the building committee and reading in part as follows:

"After a careful consideration of the problem and an examination of the lot and its surroundings I came to the conclusion that in order to reach the best solution of the problem the building should be made as picturesque in its upper stories as possible, as is consistent with dignity and grandeur, for when constructed, this building, appearing as it will above the whole city of Newark, will be the first object which meets the eye

as the city is approached, and I have therefore attempted so to design it that it should not only be a complete and elegant mass as seen from the street, but a complete design as seen above the roofs of the adjoining houses."

Norman or round arch Gothic had never developed beyond the preliminary stages on account of the earlier introduction of the pointed arch by which the problem of building in the middle ages was very much simplified; for by its use no centering is required, the small stones being held in place above the haunches by adhesion until the span is complete. For modern purposes this pointed arch is much less valuable than the round arch and has never been much used in commercial buildings for the same reason that the round arch has gradually been supplanted by the lintel form; namely, that it interferes with the light of the story immediately behind it.

It is obvious that Mr. Post held himself free from archaic restrictions and in the adoption of the round arch did not bind himself to the crude details of the time in which its use was prevalent, but freely applied the more developed and refined details of the later periods. Coincident with the construction of the original Prudential Building and for the same reasons, Mr. Post designed the Union Trust Co. Building in New York, and the Erie Savings Bank in Buffalo, in the same style.

The second building which Mr. Post designed for the Prudential Company, that on the North side of Bank Street, the last half of which has just been completed so that it now runs the full length of the block from Halsey and Broad Streets, is in the structure of its design admitted by the architect to be less purely Gothic, the dominance of the vertical line having been to a certain extent lost by the omission of the corner piers and by the omission of the splay of the wall piers; thus to the trained architectural observer the horizontal lines which existed in the first building become much more prominent.

Much interest attaches to the development of the engineering design. The walls of the first building are self-supporting and also carry the outer half-span of the floors, the interior having columns and wrought-iron

corridor and beam construction. The building on the north side of Bank Street has self-supporting walls but the floors adjoining the walls are carried on wrought-iron columns standing against the walls, excepting in the half just completed in which the columns are of steel. The interior floors are carried by wrought iron column corridors and beams in the older half of this building and steel in the new. The Halsey and Academy Street wings of this building, just completed, have full cage construction in which the walls are carried on the steel work. An examination of the exterior of the buildings shows how the thickness of the walls and the consequent reveals grow less with the changes in construction. The lessened depth of the reveals takes away from the mediæval rugged strength which the first building exhibits and yet brings them more in keeping with our modern feeling, and perhaps for the loss in one respect fully compensates.

In an earlier issue, June 1909, of THE NEW YORK ARCHITECT, reference was made to many of the materials employed in the construction as also to the painting by Mr. Blashfield called "Prudencia" which occupies the central panel of the vaulted ceiling in the board room and which painting is illustrated in this number.

The Agents' Assembly Hall in the new building is illustrated in this issue, but the photographs were made before the furniture was installed. In each end of this room appears a painting by Mr. Simmons who has symbolized insurance in its application and importance. One of our illustrations shows the painting above the rostrum and another view looking from the platform shows the second mural. The ceiling and other portions of the hall express simple dignity and grandeur as the purpose of the room would seem to require, it being for business gatherings of the officers, heads of departments and the field force.

Other illustrations which we show are defined by their captions.

PERSONAL

The London *Builder* devoted three double pages of its September 29th issue to illustrations of work of Messrs. Eames and Young of St. Louis, Mo.

NEWS NOTES AND COMMENT

PERRY MEMORIAL COMPETITION MONUMENT TO COST \$600,000.

The Building Committee of the Perry Memorial announces a competition for the selection of an architect for the Memorial which will be erected at Put-in Bay, South Bass Island, Lake Erie, near the place where Perry's victorious action was fought. The Memorial will commemorate not only the victory but the subsequent one hundred years of peace between the United States and Great Britain.

It will be a lofty commemorative monument with a museum of historic relics at its base standing in a reservation of fourteen acres. The sum of \$600,000 will be expended upon the construction of the monument and museum. The reservation is to be designed as a suitable setting for the Memorial.

The program, conforming to the principles approved by the American Institute of Architects, has been so drawn, under the direction of the Committee and Mr. Frank Miles Day, adviser to the Committee, that the problem presented is a most attractive one. Competitors will have the fullest scope for their artistic imagination. The prize of the competition will be the appointment as architect to design and superintend the construction of the Memorial. There are also to be three premiums for the authors of the designs placed next to the winner.

The Building Committee will be advised in making its awards by a jury of well-known experts.

Architects desiring a copy of the program which sets forth the conditions of participation, should make application to Mr. Webster P. Huntington, Secretary to the Building Committee, Federal Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

ATELIER AT BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

The Junior members of the Birmingham Society of Architects, consisting of draftsmen in the various offices of the practicing architects of that city have organized an

auxiliary of the Birmingham Society to be known as the Atelier of the Birmingham Society of Architects. This will enable the Juniors to study, under the guidance of a patron, the architectural problems of the Beaux Arts Society.

Mr. Wm. Leslie Walton, one of Birmingham's foremost architects, and holder of the Rotch Traveling Scholarship and several other prizes and medals, was selected patron of the Atelier.

The Atelier was organized with a membership of over fifteen students. Mr. Eugene H. Knight was selected Massier, Mr. Clifford Evans, Sou Massier, and Mr. F. O. Adams member of the Executive Committee.



SECTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE SHOW ROOM, PRUDENTIAL BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.

GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS

LANDSCAPE DESIGN.

Columbia University announces two illustrated lectures on Landscape Design to be given by Thomas H. Mawson, Lecturer at the University of Liverpool:

December 4—The Principles and Practice of Landscape Architecture.

December 8—The English Garden, with Examples of some Famous Ancient and Modern Gardenage.

The lectures are to be given in Schermer-

horn Hall, Room 305, at 4:10 P. M. and are open to the public, but the doors will be closed five minutes after the beginning of each lecture. Those who accept the invitation of the University are expected to remain in their places until the lecture is concluded. These two lectures are announced as "University Lectures on Fine Arts, 1911-12."

THE ILLUMINATING ENGINEERING SOCIETY.

Mr. Albert J. Marshall, Secretary of the New York Section of the Society, contributes to the October issue of *The Illuminating Engineer*, an article under the caption "Considering the Illuminating Engineering Society."

He mentions fourteen different societies and associations as evincing a deep interest in the subject of light and its application, including the American Institute of Architects, which society, he claims, is interested for the most part, "in the application of light from the esthetic viewpoint."

In analyzing the membership classification of the society, Mr. Marshall states, "It will be noted that architects, who have jurisdiction over most of the representative buildings and lighting installations therein placed, have 13 representatives out of a total membership of 1,530, or approximately 0.8 per cent. It will be further noted that there are five fixture manufacturers' representatives, or 0.3 per cent. of the total membership. Without in any way attempting to argue for or against the architects' and fixture manufacturers' knowledge of matters relative to

lighting, but looking at the matter from a purely practical viewpoint, weakness is evident; for between the architects and fixture manufacturers the great majority of lighting installations are designed and installed. The significance of this fact is well worth appreciating. Leaving entirely out of the question the fund of knowledge which these two classes have on the subject as a result of their extended experience, would it not be desirable to enjoy their co-operation, if for naught else than the tremendous influence they wield in the vast field over which they are masters? Without a doubt architects and fixture manufacturers would become associated with the society, and work for its cause, provided, if their affiliations were equitably effected, so as to be mutually beneficial. The Illuminating Engineering Society, or more properly speaking, a portion of its members, have made it so evident that the physical side is all important and the esthetic elements of only minor importance, and that the architect and fixture manufacturer are responsible for all that was undesirable in lighting without giving them credit for much that has been done which is truly good and elevating, that the architects and fixture manufacturers have not seen fit to associate themselves with the society."

The journal from which these excerpts are quoted refers to Mr. Marshall as "one of the charter members of the society" and says that he "has perhaps devoted more actual time and effort to promoting its work than any other single individual." Mr. Marshall is serving as secretary of the New York Section for the third term.



STAIRWAY OF ENTRANCE CORRIDOR OF MAIN PRUDENTIAL BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.
GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS



CORRIDOR, EXECUTIVE SUITE, MAIN PRUDENTIAL BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.
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COMMITTEE ROOM, PRUDENTIAL INSURANCE CO., MAIN PRUDENTIAL BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.
GEORGE B. POST & SONS, ARCHITECTS



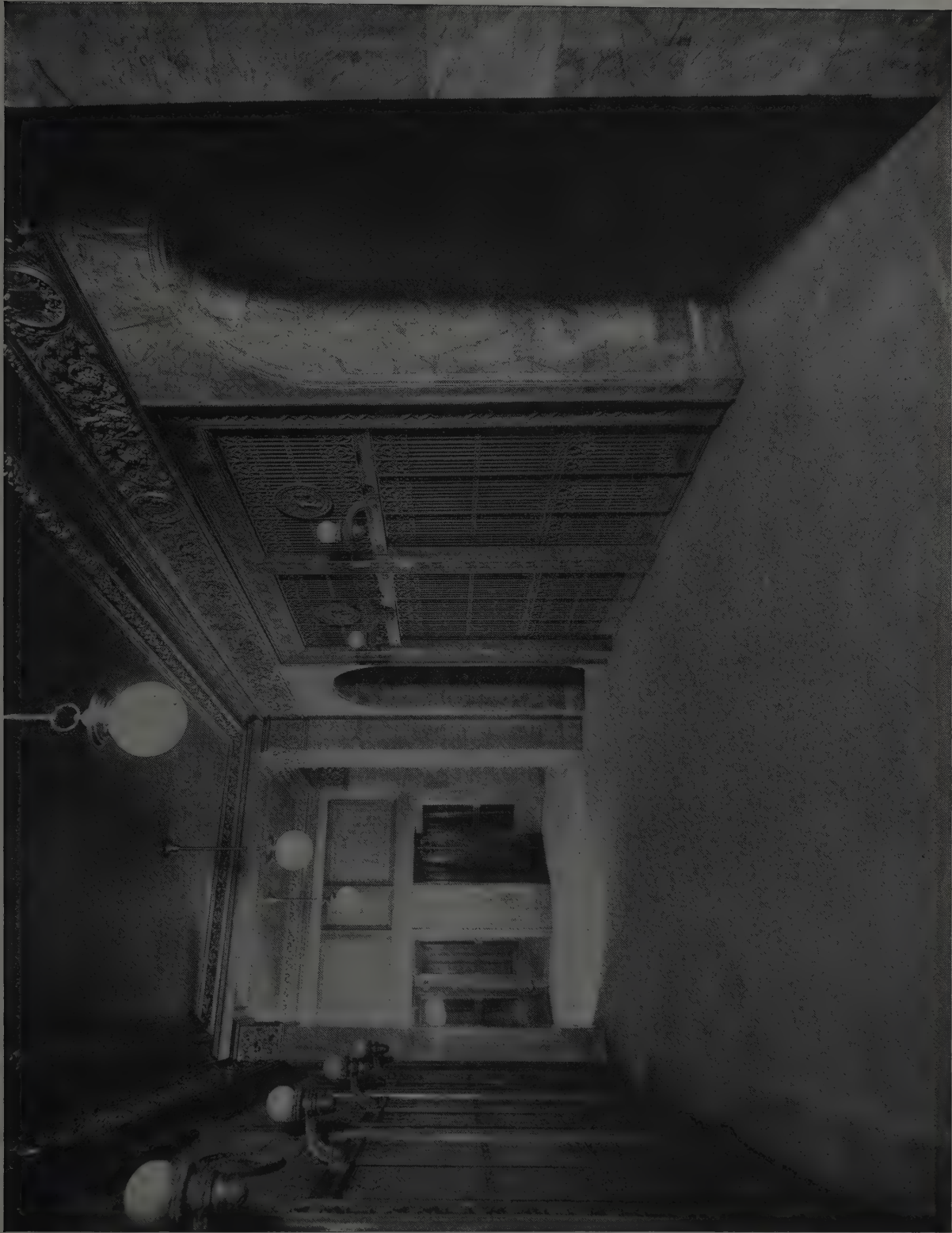
AGENTS' ASSEMBLY HALL, LOOKING FROM ROSTRUM, PRUDENTIAL NORTH BUILDING,
NEWARK, N. J.

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AGENTS' ASSEMBLY HALL, LOOKING TOWARD ROSTRUM, PRUDENTIAL NORTH BUILDING,
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ENTRANCE CORRIDOR, PRUDENTIAL NORTH BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.

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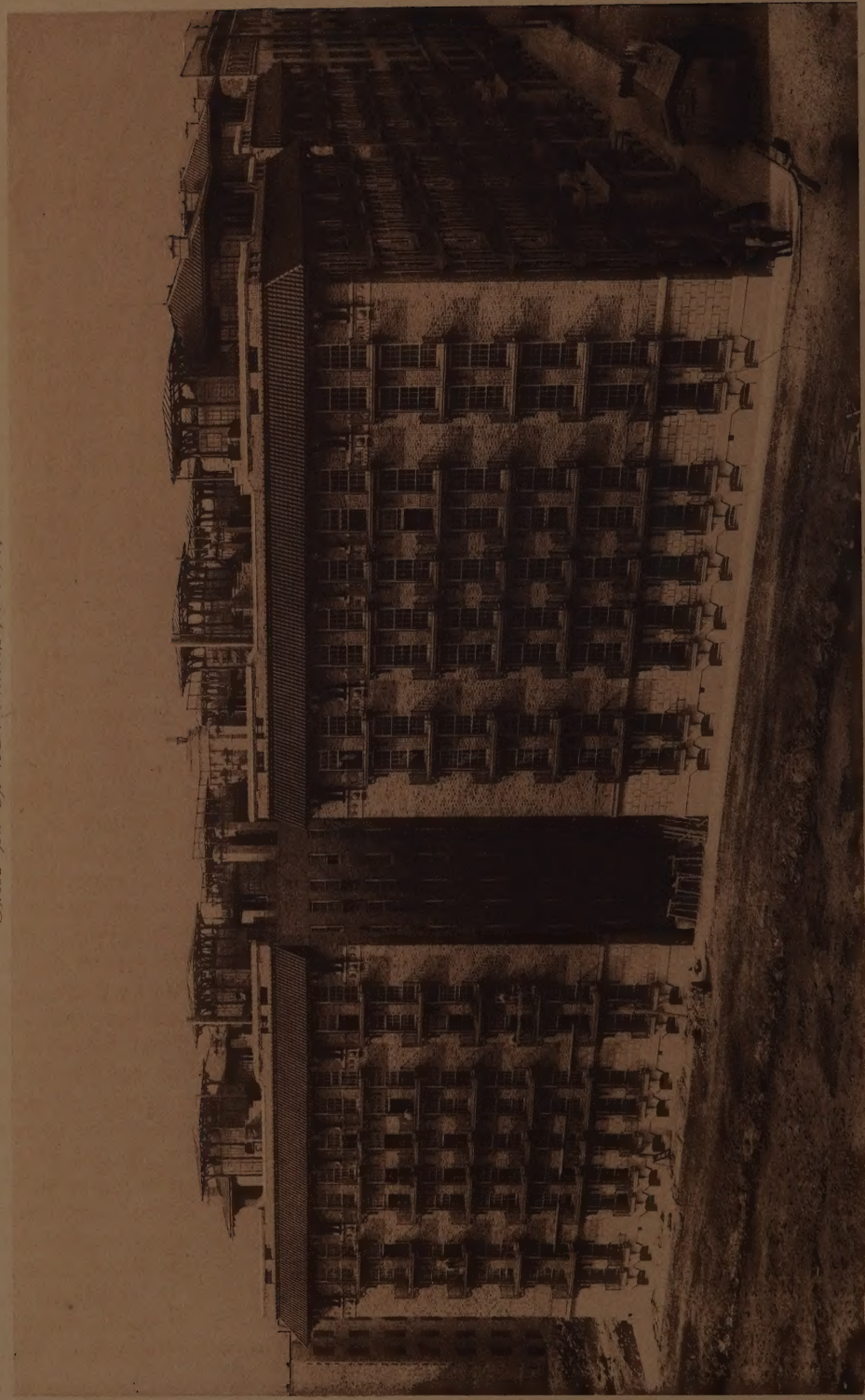
FIDELITY TRUST CO. COMMITTEE ROOM, MAIN PRUDENTIAL BUILDING, NEWARK, N. J.
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ENTRANCE CORRIDOR, PUBLIC SERVICE CORPORATION OF NEW JERSEY, PRUDENTIAL NORTH BUILDING,
NEWARK, N. J.

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This New York Architectural View Dec. 1914



HENRY ATTERBURY SMITH, ARCHITECT

Seventy-seventh Street Terrace, East River Homes, New York